

EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS SKILLFULLY BALANCE LEADERSHIP STYLES TO FACILITATE STUDENT SUCCESS: A FOCUS FOR THE REAUTHORIZATION OF ESEA

Abstract

The focus of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) on accountability created a high stakes educational environment. Although accountability is an important goal, guidance on how schools go about building the capacity to effectively accomplish the goals set in NCLB was not part of the legislation. This article supports the premise that a skillful balance of transformational and transactional leadership styles is needed to meet the expectations for accountability. An exhaustive review and analysis of literature on leadership and leadership styles, particularly focusing on transformational and transactional leadership, was conducted and incorporated into this paper. Research supports both leadership styles; however, transformational and transactional leadership focus on different aspects of the school setting. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership targets change while transactional leadership targets management functions. Both of these are important to establishing and maintaining an environment conducive to learning. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act under President Obama's administration, the opportunity is upon us to provide principals with the training needed to move schools forward to meet current expectations.

The current spotlight on accountability has no doubt changed the focus of education in the United States. Goals of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, enacted in 2002 during the George H. W. Bush administration, were to close the gap that existed between the high- and low-achieving students in this nation and to insure that all students met academic proficiency levels. The basic concepts of this legislation—accountability for results, research-based education programs, increased parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility—are fundamental to the improvement of the educational system (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). However, Popham (2001) posits that mandates targeting accountability in NCLB, which base school performance on student test results, have created paradoxical expectations. Kohn (2004) asserts that instead of improving the education of children, the threat of corrective actions on school districts for poor test results, coupled with increased public scrutiny, have created a high-stakes educational environment. In this environment, principals are faced with the challenge of how best to meet the expectations set forth by NCLB while also maintaining high expectations for quality teaching and individual student learning.

This article supports the premise that a principal's ability to skillfully balance transformational and transactional leadership styles will best position a school to accomplish the goals set forth in NCLB while also continuing to focus on individual student needs for academic success. Transformational leadership, the use of collaborative efforts and shared decision-making by stakeholders toward a common vision or goal, more effectively leads to positive changes in schools to support student achievement (Sergiovanni, 2007). In addition, efficient management of the school setting that establishes a climate conducive to learning is also important. The development of clear expectations and goals for operation in conjunction with the implementation of organizational processes and procedures to maintain a positive learning environment are focal points of the transactional leadership style (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). In a study examining transformational and transactional leadership styles of military leaders, Bass et al., (2003), revealed that the incorporation of both approaches was required in order to maintain high standards of performance. The principal's ability to balance these two leadership perspectives effectively establishes a positive school environment which facilitates quality teaching and learning and results in students who reach their full potential. Leadership training to strengthen new and currently serving principals' abilities to balance these skills should be a major component included in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act under the Obama administration.

The Principals in Today's Testing Environment

Never before has a school principal's job been more important and never before has the job been more difficult. Today's school leaders are caught between current expectations of improving test results and expectations of the past in which the principal's job was to see that the school ran smoothly and the principal was responsive to students, parents, and other stakeholders (Fullan, 2007). Elmore (2003) maintains that while accountability is certainly important, the NCLB legislation failed to provide guidance on how to effectively accomplish expectations set forth in the legislation. NCLB focuses very little on building the capacity of schools to deliver high quality instruction to students. Further, Elmore contends that the majority of principals in today's schools are not prepared for the task at hand, which exacerbates the problem. His concern is that when the focus is on improving test results with no means for developing the capacity to accomplish the goal, there will be minimal success or even failure at attempts to make the necessary changes. Ultimately, students' academic growth and development suffer.

The current spotlight on the use of test scores to demonstrate accountability without guidance or support for capacity building may inadvertently be creating a situation in which principals feel forced to take full

responsibility for the academic programs and processes of the school. This pressure could lead them to use a more authoritative leadership approach in which they alone make decisions about the instructional practices used and about curriculum development activities within the school. Lezotte and McKee (2006) and Glasser (1998) maintain that this type of coercive management in which the administration makes decisions without the input from others is ineffective and difficult to sustain for any length of time. Further, without the input from faculty and staff who work closely with the students, decisions may be made that are not in the best interest of the students.

According to Popham (2001), the results of uninformed decision-making may be the use of drill and kill test preparation practices, teaching to the test, and other strategies purported to raise test scores. In addition, Lezotte and McKee (2006) emphasized that purchasing a new program that guarantees success of the students or implementing staff development that takes the form of a one-time training session on “how to” strategies will not make much change in student success. They maintain that this scenario could lead to the dependence on ineffective teaching practices. In fact, Thompson, Madhuri, and Taylor (2008), found that many school districts have adopted supplemental programs touted to improve test scores only to find that they do not produce the results anticipated.

A much stronger basis for improving curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of students would be the implementation of meaningful and sustained professional development for school faculty and staff, focused on implementing shared decision-making processes in the school. Research supports the concept of shared decision-making as a positive force in school improvement efforts (Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003; Sahin, 2004; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006; Friedman, 2004; Korkmaz, 2007; Marks & Nance, 2007; San Antonio, 2008).

Lezotte and McKee (2006) profess that to produce the desired results of improved student learning which in turn will increase test scores, an effective leader must be able to “create and manage a process for change that inspires commitment and action from others” (p. iv). To facilitate this process for improvement in student achievement, two aspects of leadership must be considered to insure student success. Leadership skills are needed to plan and implement the use of effective instructional strategies and curriculum development with input from faculty and staff who work closely with the students. These leadership skills, coupled with management skills to maintain a smoothly run organization and an appropriate environment for learning, are the keys to success.

Kotter (1996), a leading expert on business leadership, explained the difference in leadership and management. Leadership is characterized by facilitation of the processes that guide organizations through significantly changing circumstances such as the current high-stakes testing environment. Kotter stated, “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite

obstacles” (p. 25). In contrast, Kotter states that management is necessary to keep an organization running at a steady pace. Important aspects of management included in the school setting are found in planning and organizing the necessary processes related to running the school, such as maintaining order, setting expectations, communicating with parents and other stakeholders, establishing procedures, overseeing building maintenance and efficiently managing the budget. These definitions of leadership and management mirror the meanings of transformational and transactional leadership styles. A principal’s ability to successfully lead and manage a school is very important to the success of the students within that school.

The principal’s influence with teachers, students, and staff members is a fundamental element in providing the school climate and quality instruction needed to reach the goals set in NCLB. Leithwood (2005) noted that research conducted in seven countries on the settings and conditions in which principals exercised effective leadership found that there were common variables at the classroom and school levels upon which principals had influence. Classroom variables included “time on task, quality of instruction/instructional climate, and curriculum” (p. 624). School variables found to be influenced by effective principals were “safe and orderly climate, staff participation in decision making, school culture and teacher commitment” (p. 624). Referring to Kotter’s (1996) definitions of leadership and management, some variables upon which principals had influence require leadership skills (curriculum, quality of instruction, staff participation in decision making, school culture, and teacher commitment) while others require management skills (time on task, instructional climate, and safe and orderly climate). Knowing the difference between leadership skills and management skills and how to use each effectively is important to a principal’s and a school’s success. The transformational and transactional leadership styles employ the necessary leadership and management skills identified here.

Styles of Leadership

Fullan (2007) proposes that improvement within a school should be an organizational goal and the principal key to the movement toward that goal. Finding the most effective approach to reaching that goal has been the focus of research for many years. With the current spotlight on the improvement of test scores in the U.S., it is important to the success of the students, the school, and the school district that the principal provide effective leadership and management to reach this goal. Hallinger (2003) noted that a principal’s leadership style has an important effect on student academic success, on teacher morale, and on the environment of the school. An important finding by Cotton (2003), in a study of 81 educational reports, noted that principal leadership does not affect student outcomes in a direct way, but leadership does affect student outcomes through the

principal's interactions with teachers. This finding has important implications for the ability of a principal to create a positive learning environment in which teachers and staff work together through shared decision-making to improve student academic success.

Transformational and transactional approaches to leadership have been identified as important for success in today's high-stakes testing environment. These leadership approaches were first studied in the business realm but leadership in the field of education has much in common with the business world in this aspect. According to Burns (1978), who characterized these leadership styles in relation to business, transformational leadership has a focus on change while transactional leadership has a focus on management. This description of transformational and transactional leadership has important implications for a principal working under the current pressures of accountability.

Transformational Leadership

In considering the instructional leadership role of the principal, the transformational leadership style best meets the needs of the students to reach academic success. This approach advocates a shared leadership base in which school administration, along with faculty and staff, participate in decision-making focused on effective curriculum development and instructional practices (Sergiovanni, 2007). According to Sergiovanni, transformational leaders seek to inspire and empower members of the organization to focus on a common vision and to take ownership of the change process through a collaborative approach. This type of leader encourages teachers and others to focus on the organizational purpose, its shared beliefs, and the incorporation of a team orientation. The transformational leader is more concerned with the results than the process of how to get there. The members of the organization are given the opportunity to determine the best path to take to reach the goals, insuring that the pathway meshes with the organizational beliefs and purpose. The focus on a shared vision and collaboration build a strong school culture and commitment of the faculty and staff.

Lezotte and McKee (2006) profess that the strong commitment of the members of the organization is the most important factor in insuring that effective change takes place. Further, this type of commitment is realized most often when these individuals are a part of the planning process leading to the changes they are expected to undertake. Fullan (2001) indicated that new ideas, knowledge creation, and sharing are essential to solving problems in an organization that must continuously change to keep up with society. The effective leader must be committed to implementing a collaborative process and must encourage others to participate and take leadership roles based on their knowledge and expertise for effective change to take place (Lezotte & McKee, 2006).

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction as the major factor that contributes to what students learn in school. Further, they identified three practices as the 'core of successful leadership' in characterizing a transformational leader: (a) helping staff members establish and understand the goals which are the foundation of a shared vision for the school, (b) building the capacity of those within the school and using their strengths in decision-making, and (c) changing organizational characteristics to strengthen the school culture and build collaborative processes. These practices parallel closely the variables upon which principals have influence identified by Leithwood (2005) as well as Kotter's (1996) definition of leadership.

Elmore (2004) advocates that school faculty and staff should be involved in decision-making related to instruction and curriculum development because they have the most knowledge about the needs of the students in their school. Based on their knowledge, experience, and skills, the faculty and staff should be able to make academic decisions related to course content, appropriate methods used in teaching the content, expectations of students, classroom structure and makeup, as well as assessment and evaluation practices. The knowledge and expertise of this group should not be overlooked.

In addition to shared decision-making, Elmore (2004) adds that transformational leadership also focuses on shared leadership. This approach energizes school faculty and staff by building leadership from the bottom up rather than setting mandates and expectations to be enforced from the top down. Leadership roles are taken on by faculty and staff with the experience and expertise to provide the best guidance to the organization. The school culture is one of collegiality and collaboration, in which the school community embraces a shared vision and shared commitment to school change. The ability to manage the members of the organization to work closely together in a situation where one person's strengths complement others around a common set of values or goals is the sign of the facilitative leader incorporating the transformational leadership style.

Results of several studies support the conclusion that transformational leadership has a positive impact on teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their commitment to change, and the organizational learning that takes place. Geijsel et al. (2003) found that components of transformational leadership (vision building and intellectual stimulation) had significant effects on teacher "commitment and extra effort within the context of educational reform" (p. 228). Friedman (2004) found that transformational leadership changes the workplace culture and productivity by appealing to high ideals, by changing attitudes and assumptions, and by building commitment to common goals and objectives. Korkmaz (2007) found that transformational leadership has a positive impact on teacher job satisfaction which, in turn, has a strong impact on school climate. Marks and Nance (2007) found that teachers and principals sharing in decision-mak-

ing activities have a positive influence on curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. Sahin (2004) indicated that principals and teachers noted there was a positive relationship between transformational leadership and the dimensions of a positive school culture. Nguni et al. (2006) stated that transformational leadership had significant effects on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship.

In 1999, Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach identified teacher commitment as a key element of a school's capacity for change. MacDonald (1991) stated, "It is the quality of the teachers themselves and the nature of their commitment to change that determine the quality of teaching and the quality of school improvement" (p. 3). Undoubtedly, the same holds true today. The principal who effectively incorporates a transformational leadership style has tremendous influence on the school culture and on teacher commitment.

Transactional Leadership

In addition to effective academic practices for improving student achievement, a school environment conducive to learning is an important element related to student academic success. This aspect of leadership is best accomplished through the transactional leadership style which provides for the effective oversight of the daily management and organizational needs of the school. And, according to Kotter (1996) transactional leadership results in a "degree of predictability and order and has the potential to produce the short-term success expected" (p. 26), leading to an environment conducive to learning. Sergiovanni (2007) characterizes the transactional leadership style as one that focuses on rules, procedures, and job descriptions to accomplish the organization's goals and expectations. This leadership style takes a very directive approach to managing the environment (Friedman, 2004). According to Bass et al. (2003), transactional leadership clarifies expectations and provides recognition when goals are met. Goodwin, Wofford, and Whittington (2001) indicated that this process of positive reinforcement when goals and expectations are met is effective in strengthening professional dispositions of faculty and staff. This further builds commitment and the willingness to work together for success of the organization. Satisfaction and performance of organizational members have also been positively linked to this type of leadership style (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Podsakoff, Todor, Grover, & Huber, 1984; Hunt & Schuler, 1976).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, (2005) reviewed the effective schools research from the 1970s and a general conclusion was that an important characteristic of effective schools was the leadership provided (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). In fact, Marzano et al. (2005) stated that during the 1970s effective leadership skills included specific behaviors such as "monitoring student progress on

specific learning goals, supervising teachers, promoting high expectations for student achievement and teacher performance, focusing on basic skills, and monitoring the curriculum” (p. 23), as well as providing an orderly atmosphere and learning environment (Krüger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007). The principal was seen as the one in charge of implementing change and improvements in the school. Using a hands-on approach, the principal was immersed in curriculum and instruction and worked closely with teachers on the improvement of teaching and learning. Relatively few studies during that time, however, found a direct relationship between a principal’s hands-on supervision of classroom instruction, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Hallinger, 2003).

Critics allege that, considering the nature, conditions, and responsibilities of the present day principal’s role, the 1970s approach to transactional leadership would be an impossible task (Hallinger, 2003). In addition, Friedman (2004) posits that transactional leadership of this type ignores the knowledge and experience of teachers who work on a daily basis with students but who must carry out the mandates and directives related to curriculum and instruction set out for them.

Sergiovanni (2007) currently describes transactional leadership in education as leadership in which the principal maintains a tightly structured organizational operation. The principal who espouses this type of leadership style manages the organization with mechanical precision. The environment is clean, orderly, and predictable, with set routines and procedures. Maintaining an orderly, safe, and healthy school environment has been shown to positively influence student learning (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2008; Johnson & Stevens, 2006). Transactional leadership applied to this aspect of education should provide the positive environment for effective teaching and academic success for students.

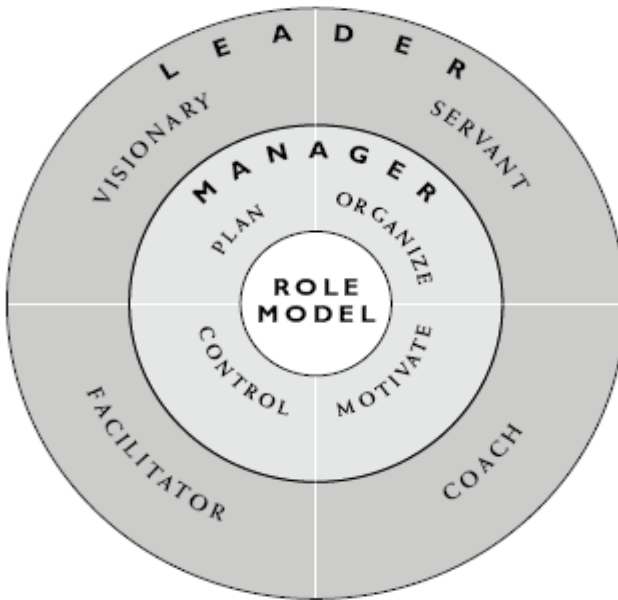
A Balance of Leadership Styles

According to Mintzberg (2004), effective leadership energizes people to make effective decisions and to make improvements in their organization. “Effective leadership inspires more than it empowers; it connects more than it controls; it demonstrates more than it decides” (p. 143). Stigler and Hiebert (1999) determined that if teachers are expected to play a role in the decision-making process, they must be provided the appropriate school environment in which to do this work. Likewise, student academic success depends on a positive learning environment. The instructional leader who also has strong management skills—a balance of transformational and transactional leadership styles—would seem to be the most effective principal in today’s educational environment focused on raising student test scores.

By perfecting the combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles, principals allow the faculty and staff to share their

knowledge and expertise in making decisions which focus on improving instruction and curriculum toward a shared vision. This shared role allows faculty and staff to take ownership of the changes and builds commitment and a positive school culture. In addition, the school climate and the learning environment are positive and orderly, expectations for students and teachers are high, and the stage is set to insure student learning.

Crane (2007) developed a transformational coaching model for the business world that incorporates elements of both transformational and transactional leadership styles. He explains that leadership is not restricted to the top level administrators, but his coaching model should be a focus for all members of the organization. Crane defines leadership as the “constructive influencing of others in the achievement of organizational goals and objectives by providing direction, support, and a positive example through role modeling” (p. 33). This model, which focuses on the business leader as *Role Model*, *Manager*, and *Leader*, could be used by the school principal who is striving to create the positive school environment necessary for facilitating the academic success of all students (See Figure 1).



From "The Heart of Coaching" (third edition), by Thomas G. Crane, FTA Press, 2007,

Figure 1: Transformational Coaching Model

At the center of the transformational coaching model is the concept of the Role Model. The principal, by virtue of his/her position in the organiza-

tion, has a great deal of influence over the attitudes and behaviors of the faculty, staff, and students. As a role model, the principal's responsibility is, through his/her own behaviors, to lead by example. The principal must constantly maintain focus on the expectations and goals as well as to facilitate the shared decision-making processes and collaborative nature inherent in this environment. The second ring of the model establishes the management role of the principal as the transactional leader. This element of Manager encompasses core management competencies such as planning, organization, control, and motivation. These competencies serve to establish and maintain the school facility and a climate necessary for effective teaching and learning to take place. With the environment set for learning to take place the outer ring, which characterizes the transformational leadership role, can be implemented. In this Leader position, the principal serves as the visionary, servant, facilitator, and coach. The principal coordinates a school organization that utilizes the skill, knowledge, and experience of the members to develop and implement the best instructional strategies related to the curriculum and thus maximizes learning for all students. Principals in this role help establish the goal and vision for the future of the organization, facilitate and encourage the collaborative culture, and set the stage for student academic success.

Crane (2007) posits that business leaders who are able to incorporate the components of his transformational coaching model develop high-performing teams that are able to consistently outperform others. This leader cultivates a high-performance culture energized and focused on the strategic goals of the business at hand, especially during times of change. This type of environment, guided by a balance of transformational and transactional leadership styles would prove very valuable in the educational setting. Students and teachers who are part of an environment with these characteristics would surely thrive. Faculty and staff would feel that their knowledge and expertise were valued, the instructional skills of teachers would improve, and ultimately, student learning and achievement would improve.

An Excellent Example

In her book, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons to America from a Small School in Harlem*, Deborah Meier (2002) recounts how she, a band of teachers, and a hand-full of community members reformed the Central Park East Elementary School (CPE) in New York in the mid-1970s. Meier exemplified the leadership traits outlined in Crane's transformational coaching model. This school had the lowest test scores in the city. The group's goal was to reform their school and improve student performance, and they were successful at meeting these goals. In the process, Meier didn't focus on her leadership style but facilitated the group as they carried out the business of making schools real learning places. They knew what to do in some instances and in other instances they had to find their way.

In the midst of it all, theories of both transformational and transactional leadership were at work. Certainly, as Hallinger (2003) purports, Meier led her group by coordinating and supervising curriculum development and instruction in the school. She did not, however, see that job as hers—the principal’s—unitarily. In conjunction with her being at the center of curriculum and instruction work, Meier recounts with equal importance the collaborative nature of the group in decision-making and carrying out the job to be done. And during all this, the managerial aspects of life in school (transactional leadership) had to work hand-in-hand with the changes to curriculum and instruction that were taking place in order for the school to run smoothly.

Most of Meier’s story of CPE revolved around transformational leadership behaviors. As Leithwood (1992) described, Meier and her teachers spent time helping each other to develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; to promote and engage in their own professional growth; and to invite the school community to solve problems together. Meier and her teacher leaders were transformational leaders. Their work made a difference in student outcomes at CPE and inspired a school reform movement which had profound effects on the entire New York Public School System. In 1985, using the same philosophy, Meier opened the Central Park East Secondary School in collaboration with National Coalition of Essential Schools founded by Ted Sizer. Her work in this school resulted in a graduation rate of 90 percent with 90 percent of those graduates going on to college. This school was “lauded as a model of urban education reform” (Roundtable, Inc, 2001). The success of her work lies in four factors. She successfully

- fostered a democratic community
- gave teachers greater autonomy in the running of the school
- gave parents a voice in what happened to their children in school
- promoted a family-oriented system. (§ 2)

The success of these schools exemplifies the importance of successfully balancing leadership and management roles. A principal with this capability provides the opportunity for students to thrive in a school environment in which they are able to reach their full potential.

Conclusion

Improving the quality of education in US schools and insuring that all students reach their academic potential is vitally important for the continued growth of our nation, the well-being of our citizens, and our ability to compete in a global economy. Holding a school accountable for the education of its students was an important and worthwhile goal of NCLB. However, sufficient support was not provided to the school districts to build the capacity for change and effectively accomplish the goal.

In the recently published *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, Duncan (U.S. DoE, 2010) emphasizes the importance of having a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school. He also indicates that school environments must provide teachers the time to collaborate and have opportunities to lead. The second key priority in the administration's blueprint, *Great Teachers and Great Leaders in Every School*, lists three areas of focus:

- Effective teachers and principals—States are called upon to evaluate teachers and principals based on student growth and other factors. These systems of evaluation are expected to inform professional development to assist in strengthening the teachers and principals in the schools.
- Placing best teachers and principals where they are most needed—Funds will be made available to states and districts to develop and support effective teachers and principals to work in high-poverty, high-minority schools.
- Strengthening teacher and leader preparation and recruitment—States are called upon to monitor the effectiveness of their teacher/principal training programs (traditional and alternative) and based on the success of their graduates (as determined by student growth and other factors) the administration will invest in these effective programs.

The need for effective principals is clearly established in the administration's blueprint. The importance of the school environment is also noted, as well as the need for training and support for principals and teachers. However, with no specifics regarding the expectations for training and support, it is difficult to determine the administration's views on what the major areas of focus for training and support should be. As with NCLB, there is no indication that guidance and support for building the capacity of a school and school district to change is included. The results of the reauthorization of ESEA will be the same as NCLB if guidance and support for building the capacity of schools to change is not a priority.

Training programs for new principals should include guidance on balancing transformational and transactional leadership styles in order to facilitate positive, collaborative learning environments for teaching and learning. Experienced principals already in the field should receive similar training. Both groups should receive support and mentoring as they move through the process of successfully balancing these approaches to become the most effective principals possible. Research to determine the most effective approach to balancing the two leadership styles should be conducted. The information gained would be invaluable to the leadership in schools moving through a change process. The futures of our children and our nation are at stake. We cannot afford to overlook the opportunity available through the reauthorization of ESEA.

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Kaye Pepper is an Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education at the University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi.